DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 770 CG 023 074

AUTHOR Erchul, William P.; Scott, Susan Smith
TITLE In Search of the Elusive "Hobbit": A Family Intervention Case with a Psychoeducational Focus.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 36p.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling Theories; *Educational Diagnosis; *Family Counseling; High Schools; Homework; Parent Student Relationship; *Psychoeducational Methods; *Study Habits; *Time Management; Writing Assignments

ABSTRACT

This case study concerns an attempt to help a 15-year-old with the completion of written assignments and the development of time management and study skills. The document first presents the problem of the girl, Lisa, who could not complete longer written assignments due to an obsessive-compulsive anxiety disorder. The relevant history to the case is then examined in detail, and intervention strategies and results are described for family, parent-collateral, and client sessions over 16 weeks. The changes in the client during each week are described in conjunction with a writing assignment--a short story to serve as an introduction to J. R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit." The report concludes with a discussion of the successes, failures, lessons learned and changes that need to be implemented in the next program. A table that describes the Mother and Daughter Priority Rankings of Daughter's Activies is attached. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

In Search of the Elusive Hobbit: A Family Intervention Case with a Psychoeducational Focus

William P. Erchul
Susan Smith Scott
The Psychoeducational Clinic
North Carolina State University

ED327770

CG023074

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William P. Erchul

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Introduction

The family case study to be described concerns an attempt to help a 15-year-old girl with the completion of written assignments and the development of time management and study skills. Although school psychologists often deal with these issues through direct services to students, rarely are such interventions conducted acknowledging a single-parent family system perspective (e.g., Carlson, 1985; 1987) or documented in as much detail as the format of this monograph allows. Though far from successful, we believe that our efforts produced some positive outcomes; certainly we learned some valuable lessons along the way.

At the outset, several aspects of this case appear significant in understanding its context. First, treatment was conducted in a psychoeducational clinic affiliated with a school psychology training program. Despite the clinical setting, given the progression of treatment there is no reason to believe that this intervention would be any less successful if conducted in the school setting. Second, whenever possible, both authors worked together as co-therapists. A school psychologist in the field interested in adapting this intervention might consider enlisting a qualified school counselor to serve as co-therapist, particularly if another

psychologist were unavailable (cf. Dombalis & Erchul, 1987). Third, although the primary focus was on a school problem and the intervention was implemented by two school psychologists, the client's school was remarkably unresponsive to our requests for information and follow-up. Specifically, repeated attempts to contact school personnel were unsuccessful. Perhaps if the intervention had been school-based, this situation would not have occurred.

Presenting Problem

Lisa V. was referred to the authors by her mother, Mrs. Sylvia V., who was concerned particularly with Lisa's inability to complete longer written assignments. Given this central problem, WPE initially suggested to Sylvia that referral to another campus clinic concerned exclusively with academic tutoring would be more appropriate. However, Sylvia made it clear that she wanted help from "psychologists." This statement suggested that issues in addition to academic tutoring were involved and that a more family-based treatment approach was advisable. In addition to the writing problem, Lisa had an obsessive-compulsive anxiety disorder and had been hospitalized about eight months previously as a result of a suicide attempt. Although Lisa was under the care of a psychiatrist, it appeared that the

family needed additional assistance and support. The specific charge from Sylvia was to respond to the psychoeducational aspects of the case.

Relevant History

The two central figures with whom we worked over a three month period were Lisa and Sylvia. Lisa, a fifteen year old tenth grade student, was a respected musician and actress who traveled extensively to give performances and spent many evenings in rehearsal for these performances. This grueling schedule was stressful for her and obviously took time away from the completion of homework assignments. Notwithstanding, her intellectual abilities allowed her to earn largely "A"'s and "B"'s in all courses except those requiring term papers. Further complicating this picture was the fact that eight months previously she was hospitalized for approximately three weeks as a result of a suicide attempt. Lisa, diagnosed as having an obsessive-compulsive anxiety disorder, subsequently was under the care of a psychiatrist who prescribed imipramine and saw her weekly. Over the course of our treatment, the dosage of imipramine was gradually reduced and the frequency of visits to the psychiatrist decreased.

Sylvia V., Lisa's mother, was a single-parent in her late-forties. She possessed a masters' degree in

education and was employed as an administrator in the public sector. Sylvia's job required her to travel a fair amount and to work late at least two evenings per week. She seemed to have adjusted well from her divorce that took place about nine years previously. However, Sylvia faced significant stress from several other sources: (a) her job, a position of responsibility that she needed to maintain in order to survive economically as a single parent: (b) her adolescent daughter, with whom she had a peer-like relationship and for whom she could not set adequate limits; and (c) the confict resulting from the realization that her time and resources were too limited to address both her personal and professional needs as well as Lisa's personal, academic, and artistic needs.

Three adult males were peripherally involved in this case. Jerry, Lisa's 30-year-old brother, still lived at home. It was Jerry who discovered Lisa following her suicide attempt and who acted decisively to bring her to the psychiatric hospital. Robert, Lisa's father and Sylvia's ex-husband, occasionally picked up Lisa from the treatment sessions. Lisa reported having limited contact with her father despite the fact he lived in the area. The relationship between Sylvia and Robert appeared to be cool and business-like. A third male, Frank, was

Lisa's boyfriend whom she met while hospitalized. Frank, 18-years-old, was known to have some drug problems at one time, but Sylvia overall regarded him as a positive influence on her daughter. Neither Jerry, nor Robert, nor Frank participated in the sessions which are described below.

Intervention Strategies and Results

Week 1

Family session. At this initial meeting attended by Sylvia, Lisa, and the two authors, the focus was on: (a) defining Lisa's current school problems, (b) discussing the methods to be used in addressing these difficulties, and (c) outlining some tentative goals for treatment. All parties were actively involved in decisions regarding these issues, and, at the end of the first session, it was decided that the primary focus of treatment efforts would be to help Lisa with her inability to complete written school assignments.

A consultative/tutoring treatment model with weekly client sessions with Lisa, biweekly parent collateral sessions with Sylvia, and several family sessions involving mother and daughter was thought to be the most effective means of addressing this problem. The second author (SSS) was to conduct the client sessions, while the first author (WPE) was to work with Sylvia; both would be active as co-therapists

during family sessions.

Three tentative goals for Lisa were agreed upon: (a) she would develop a more objective view of personal accomplishments and activities, (b) she would allow sufficient time for the completion of individual activities, and (c) she would regularly complete written assignments. It was decided that aiding Lisa with time management, realistic scheduling of non-academic events, and efficient organization strategies would be beneficial as well. Goals for the parent collateral sessions were not made explicit, although there was an implicit understanding that they would involve further discussion of Lisa and offer support to Sylvia. Goals for the family sessions developed as treatment progressed. Length of treatment was set initially at six weeks, although an additional six weeks of treatment were added at Sylvia's insistence. Sessions were held weekly and were one hour in length.

Week 2

Client session. At this initial training session, time was spent to establish rapport and to gain an objective view of Lisa's: (a) daily schedule in school, (b) time usage when not in the school setting, and (c) learning and study strategies. Toward these ends, the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) (Weinstein, Schulte, & Palmer, 1987) was administered to Lisa. Percentile scores were

obtained in nine domains, though they must be interpreted with caution due to the LASSI's norming on a somewhat older population. The scores of interest were: time management (40th percentile), concentration (40th percentile), and self testing (30th percentile). These scores were interpreted roughly to mean that Lisa study skills in general were below her potential to achieve. The client also was requested to complete a form which listed the periods of an academic week. For each period she was to provide information regarding the subject taught, teacher, and assignments required in that class including in-class work, homework, and any long-term papers or projects expected.

The remaining time was used to introduce Lisa to another time usage form. This schedule contained each day of the week and blocks of time from 2:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. in one hour increments. She was instructed to complete this form by writing in the activities which usually took place within that time period. The activities listed were to be those which regularly occurred in that time period and which occurred for at least several weeks in a row. Lisa was also given Rotter's (1966) locus of control scale to complete. She was requested to complete the daily time schedule and locus of control scale at home and return with them at next week's session.

Parent collateral session. WPE spent most of this session getting to know Sylvia and obtaining background information on Lisa and her problems. Sylvia seemed excited about the psychoeducational focus of treatment and at the prospect that she would be involved in the process. Also apparent from this session were Sylvia's frustrations as a single-parent employed in a high pressure job. Her hectic work schedule did not permit much of a social life and many of her non-work hours were spent attending to Lisa's development as an entertainer. Furthermore, Lisa's personal and school problems that had emerged in the past year had overwhelmed Sylvia. As a well-educated woman, Sylvia felt particularly inadequate with her inability to solve Lisa's writing problems. WPE offered support and understanding, and encouraged Sylvia to reserve some time each day for herself.

Week 3

Client session. The agenda for this session was to review the client's school schedule, projected assignments, and the completed schedule of time use during non-school hours. After this review, SSS planned to question the efficacy of Lisa's current use of available time and attempt to organize a schedule for completion of academic work. However, Lisa was 30 minutes late and had lost both the schedule and

locus of control form. As a result, SSS and Lisa began work on a written project which was already two days late.

The assignment was to write a short story to serve as an introduction to The Hobbit (Tolkien, 1977). It was essentially a lesson in creative writing although several specific elements were required. The directions specified that Lisa was to write a fantasy about a place she would like to visit. This setting could be real or imaginary, and take place any time in the past, present , or future. She had to list three reasons why she would like to go there and then begin her adventure. In the course of the story, she was to include how she got to this setting, what she did while in this setting, who accompanied her, and how long she remained there. In addition, she was to create some "evil force" she might encounter and explain how she returned home again.

Lisa succeeded in completing an introduction which set up her story nicely. SSS and Lisa then addressed each required element of the story and , in the form of an outline, brainstormed at least one possible way each element could be developed. It was explained that to complete this assignment all she needed to do was embellish the basic outline.

SSS then questioned Lisa about the timeline for

completion of the assignment. The work had been assigned six days ago, and had been due two days ago. Little progress was apparent despite the fact time had been given at school to work on the project. Lisa explained she had meant to finish it over the weekend but had used that time to go out with Frank and to sleep. She knew she was able to complete this assignment but got "sidetracked and didn't want to ."

When asked for a projected date for completion of the assignment, Lisa said she would complete it that evening. SSS then confronted her about the feasibility of this plan. That evening Lisa had to complete homework in several other subjects, study for an Algebra test, choreograph a dance, and attend a young women's group meeting. She was asked if it was reasonable to expect she would in actuality complete this story and she replied "no." Lisa then indicated that she could complete the assignment by next Monday. Again, SSS questioned this plan. Lisa was to go out of town from Friday through late Sunday night and realistically could not finish the assignment. Lisa finally stated that she could definitely complete the project in one week, and this appeared reasonable. As this session drew to a close, Lisa was given copies of the lost locus of control scale and time use forms and again was asked to complete these at home and bring them, along with her finished fantasy, to

next week's session.

Week 4

Client session. The proposed agenda for this session was once again to review the client's use of time during non-academic hours and assist her in scheduling consistent time periods for work completion. However, Lisa again had failed to complete this form as well as the locus of control scale. In addition, she had completed only one five-word sentence on her fantasy paper since the previous week.

Given these events, this session was spent working primarily on her unfinished fantasy project. Lisa was told to begin by reviewing her outline and getting a clear idea of the progression of her story. She then began elaborating on the basic components of the outline.

Lisa had great difficulty focusing her efforts on this task. She began sequentially, but then picked up the outline and began to describe events which were to occur much later in the story. When SSS asked her to write these thoughts down for later use, Lisa often would pick another part of the outline and begin to verbally embellish this component. In a mild confrontation, SSS pointed out that this was very creative and enjoyable but that without written records of her thoughts the story would not be

completed.

Lisa then returned to the beginning of her story and began approaching the task in a more organized, sequential manner. However, she had difficulty choosing words to express her ideas. A thesaurus was introduced to assist her, but this created more problems in that she then perused the thesaurus for long periods of time searching for the perfect word. While thinking of all the various words she might use, Lisa often lost a clear idea of where the sentence was actually leading and, after finding an appropriate word, could not finish the sentence. This development led her to think of another sentence which she would invariably fail to finish due to another exhaustive search for a good word to place in a certain part of the sentence.

At this point, SSS instructed Lisa to complete her sentences, to follow each thought through to the end, and to leave a blank space for words she could not think of immediately. This strategy was somewhat successful and allowed the client to complete several paragraphs by the end of the session. At the conclusion of this session, Lisa promised that the Hobbit story, time schedule, and locus of control scale would be completed by next week's session.

Parent collateral session. WPE's original plan was to start the session by insisting the Sylvia monitor Lisa's homework assignments more closely and enforce their completion. However, this plan was abandoned when Sylvia started talking and did not stop until 40 minutes later. She began by relating more information about Lisa's psychiatric history and current busy schedule, but shifted over time to tell WPE about the demands on her time, particularly those which were job-related. WPE made no attempt to interrupt this flow, thinking that this outpouring of frustration would be cathartic for Sylvia. As in the first parent session, support and understanding were offered. WPE also pointed out certain parallels between mother and daughter: (a) both were very bright and perfectionistic women who could show significant accomplishments but who led extremely active and, at times, stressful, lives; and (b) both apparently needed to establish priorities in order to fit important activities into their available time and, in so doing, reduce their stress levels. Sylvia agreed, stating that many of the same issues that applied to Lisa also applied to her. Unfortunately, the session ended before WPE could deal with the session's original goal--to emphasize that Sylvia needed to monitor Lisa's homework completion more carefully.

Week 5

Client session. The agenda for this session was to review Lisa's use of time during non-academic hours and, if she failed to have this completed form, to complete this schedule during the session. This agenda needed to be followed due to the client's continuing difficulty in following through on written assignments. The a priori goal was to schedule specific times each day when homework was to be completed. Unfortunately, Lisa did not have her time schedule completely done, nor had she completed the locus of control scale or the Hobbit story. The session began by completing work on the time schedule. This schedule revealed that she was exceptionally busy with non-academic activities during the week. Besides our weekly sessions, Lisa attended voice lessons, rehearsals, and performed in various settings. In addition, all of these activities involved complex transportation arrangements. However, there were several blocks of time which were relatively free:

Mondays - 7:30 - 10:00 p.m.

Tuesday - 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.; 7:30 - 10:00 p.m.

Thursday - 8:30 - 10:00 p.m.

Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays - nothing regularly scheduled.

These free periods were listed and Lisa was asked how she currently used this time. She replied that

typically she slept, talked on the phone, and ran her errands. It also appeared that much time was spent going out to eat and running errands with her mother.

With these free periods in mind, SSS questioned her about current methods of completing homework. Her strategies included doing homework: at lunch, on the bus, prior to classes in the morning, in the class prior to the period when homework was due, at her father's office, and by copying friends' completed homework. Lisa also added that her routine homework assignments were usually handed in on time, but they were not always completely finished. A major exception to this were English papers, which often were extremely late. (Certainly we had first-hand knowledge of this fact.)

The free periods in her schedule were introduced again as times where Lisa could consistently work on homework. She stated that she might be able to set standard times for homework with her mother's help, but admitted that she would be extremely upset with her mother if anything like that were to be actually attempted and enforced. She further indicated her willingness to discuss this topic at our family session that following week. However, as the session was ending, Lisa mentioned that she was considering taking modeling lessons which met several times per week and setting aside time daily to walk her dogs. In other

words, it seemed as though these free periods identified in her schedule could be filled with other activities very soon. Lisa was reminded a third time to complete the Hobbit assignment and a fourth time to complete the locus of control scale.

Week 6

Client session. A list of activities the client regularly engaged in was developed using her completed time use form. The purpose of this brief session, which preceded the family meeting, was to have the client prioritize her activities. This priority listing was done to permit Lisa some insight into how she actually perceived the different activities she participated in and to allow her mother and the authors to gauge which, if any, activities might be dropped in an effort to facilitate completion of school work. In addition, the locus of control scale was to be completed in this session if Lisa had not followed through with previous requests in this regard.

Lisa was instructed to look at the list of activities and to rank them according to how important these activities were to her. She was encouraged to disregard how she felt her mother or others would regard the activities and instead focus on her feelings. She was reluctant to do this task and had to be encouraged to finish the rankings. After the initial ranking, SSS asked if she were satisfied that

the rankings truly reflected her preferences. Lisa replied that she knew some items (e.g., homework) were important and necessary if she were to attend college so they were ranked higher. After some more discussion, some rankings were changed to reflect more accurately Lisa's true preferences. This exercise was repeated later with Sylvia responding: (a) as she thought Lisa would, and (b) according to her own preferences for Lisa. Table 1 contains responses from daughter and mother.

Insert Table 1 about here

Next, the locus of control scale (Rotter, 1966) was completed. Again, this was not an easy task for Lisa; she re-read items several times and often changed her responses. Lisa's locus of control appeared to be mixed and dependent upon situational factors, though even in similar situations her responses were not consistent. Her answers to items directly pertaining to belief in "luck or fate" were often contradictory as were those which questioned whether school grades were due to a student's work and effort or luck and teacher's moods. Lisa stated that she did not like many of the items due to their inclusion of the terms "always" or "never."

Parent collateral session. The purpose of this

15 minute meeting, which occurred just prior to the second family session, was to have Sylvia assign priority rankings to nine of Lisa's frequent activities. As noted above, Table 1 contains rankings from daughter and mother.

Family session. The first half of this session was spent discussing the information contained in Table 1. Although Lisa and Sylvia tended to offer similar rankings for many activities, there were some general areas of disagreement. First, Lisa viewed her personal time as more important than did her mother. Second, Sylvia placed a greater emphasis on academic activities than did Lisa. (However, it is interesting to note that Sylvia ranked completion of "longer written assignments" as only a medium-level priority despite the fact this was her primary reason for requesting our services.) Third, Lisa considered her musical/theatrical performances as more important than did her mother.

In general, Sylvia and Lisa were somewhat surprised at the other's priority rankings. For example, Sylvia had not been aware of the importance of personal time to Lisa. Also, although Sylvia knew that Lisa would not rank academic activities very highly, she was dismayed that Lisa had ranked them so low. This comment led WPE to ask about Lisa's college aspirations. She planned to attend college and pursue

either a liberal arts education or a performing arts education. The authors emphasized the role of priorities when planning for one's educational future (i.e., if Lisa were to pursue the liberal arts, than scholastic performance should assume a higher priority; if pursuing a performing career, then practice and performing time should assume a higher priority). Both Lisa and her mother felt that these observations were correct. However, Sylvia believed that an equal emphasis on both types of activities would serve to increase Lisa's future educational options.

Realizing that this strategy had not succeeded in having Lisa and Sylvia make a firm commitment to either academic or performing activities, WPE and SSS tried a second strategy. Specifically, the authors asked if one or more activities could be dropped completely or be engaged in less frequently. Lisa and Sylvia responded quickly that the sessions with the psychiatrist had been reduced already to every two weeks. They saw this develpment as a significant concession in this regard. WPE and SSS questioned whether this really resulted in more time being made available, and then asked them for other activities that might be considered. Lisa suggested that her attendance at meetings of the young women's group be discontinued. WPE and SSS agreed that, given its

ranking of 9 by Lisa and the fact that it did not actually pertain to either academics or performing, that this activity was a reasonable choice. Sylvia, who had ranked these meetings more highly, felt that they were worthwile and should not be dropped. Lisa and Sylvia were unable to suggest other activities to eliminate and appeared unwilling to accept the authors' suggestions. It appeared that mother and daughter found this session enlightening but this greater awareness did not translate into concrete changes in their lifestyles.

Week 7

Client session. This session was used to work on unfinished written projects, including the Hobbit paper. Parts of the paper's outline had been lost and had to be recreated in this session. The thrust of the session was to: observe and comment on Lisa's strategies for work completion; focus her attention; and assist her in realistically evaluating, revising, and accepting the work she completed instead of throwing out entire segments of the paper if dissatisfied. This approach was adhered to for approximately one-half of the session. At this point, Lisa became somewhat oppositional. She verbally began an entirely new story based on a second, different novel, and resisted attempts to return to her original plot. Lisa was allowed to verbally

develop her new story for about five minutes. At that point she was told that she now had two viable stories from which to choose. One of these (her original) was roughly half done and on paper; the other was fairly well-thought out but would need to be written from the beginning. Given her choice of stories, she chose to continue working on the original one and decided to use the other for a drama project. The remaining time was used constructively with only periodic spurts of creativity focused on the second story. Lisa was again requested to complete the Hobbit assignment, now a month overdue.

Parent collateral session. Frustrated and disappointed over Lisa's continuing failure to complete a variety of written assignments, WPE candidly questioned Sylvia about why she was unable to play a role in assisting (or at least monitoring) her daughter in this regard. Sylvia responded to these questions by stating that their hectic schedules did not allow opportunities for this type of activity. When WPE suggested that one's priorities could be rearranged, Sylvia agreed and further resolved that she would try to be more actively involved from then on. Sensing that Sylvia would be unable to follow through as fully as she promised, WPE engaged her in a brainstorming process concerned with identifying other

resources that could facilitate Lisa's work completion. Some of the resources Sylvia identified were: (a) school personnel (e.g., counselor, study hall teacher, homeroom teacher); (b) Jerry, Lisa's brother; and (c) several of Lisa's classmates. Perhaps that most promising resource mentioned was the study hall teacher, who was in a position to assess Lisa's progress on a daily basis. Sylvia indicated that she could contact the teacher and discuss this possibility. Later in the session, the topic shifted to Frank, Lisa's boyfriend. Frank was not considered a good choice as an academic tutor for Lisa, but WPE suggested that time spent with Frank could serve as a positive reinforcer for Lisa's successful completion of school assignments. Sylvia felt this was a good suggestion and indicated that she would try to incorporate it as an at-home intervention.

Week 8

Client session. This session's agenda was designed to further assist Lisa in developing effective strategies to complete written assignments. The Hobbit paper still was not completed and a sixth reminder was issued to bring the completed paper next week. In this session, SSS and Lisa worked on several essay questions which were to be on a forthcoming English test. The essays were drawn from the content of two novels read in English class. The questions

required knowledge of specific events in both books as well as the ability to synthesize information, make inferences, and justify responses. The essays were to be answered in class and the students were to think through their responses and make outlines to assist them prior to the exam.

Lisa had read both books and had a thorough grasp of their content. However, she required assistance in focusing her attention on the specific questions asked, because her tendency was to concentrate instead on peripheral issues and ideas which the questions evoked in her. When kept on task, Lisa was able to formulate outlines for the questions with relative ease.

Week 9

Client session. This meeting began with a discussion of Lisa's yet-to-be-finished Hobbit paper. Her schedule was subsequently reexamined and specific time periods were blocked out for this paper to be written. The identified time segments were brief periods in which Lisa was to work without interruption. Then, reinforcers (e.g., one brief phone call to a friend) were specified for each block of time she effectively worked on the project. Sufficient time periods existed to ensure completion of the paper even if she did not use several of the work times. Lisa was then asked to assign a percentage to the level of confidence she felt about

completion of the project. She said she was 80% sure the paper would be done by next week's session. The remainder of the session was spent working on the Hobbit assignment so that the work to be completed would be reduced even further. The strategies used thus far in treatment were reviewed and consolidated into a single list which could be referred to when working at home. These strategies included: leaving blanks for words she couldn't think of, following a thought (i.e., sentence) through to its completion on paper before making revisions, following the outline sequentially, stopping negative thoughts about the quality of her writing (Wolpe, 1973), and marking portions of the story she was unsure about so someone could assist her at a later time. Beyond these strategies, the major themes stressed were: (a) the most important goal was to finish the story, (b) perfection was not expected, and (c) creative additions could be made anywhere in the story after the paper was written once in its entirety.

Parent collateral session. This meeting was canceled by Sylvia.

Week 10

Prior to the tenth session, the authors met due to shared concerns about Lisa's continued inability to complete assignments and the mother's ineffectual efforts to monitor and enforce the completion of her

daughter's assignments, both in school and in our sessions. In response, the institution of a contingency plan governing further treatment was agreed upon. This plan involved meeting with Lisa only when she had completed the work assigned at the previous week's session. If Lisa had not completed the assignment, she was to inform her mother who would then phone WPE by noon on the day of the scheduled meeting. This contingency plan was to affect weekly client sessions only, not parent or family sessions. It was believed that sufficient rapport had been established and that Lisa and Sylvia valued the tutoring sessions enough to make this a viable plan.

Client session. The purpose of this session was to introduce the contingency plan and continue assisting the client with effective work strategies. However, when Lisa arrived she stated that she had lost the entire Hobbit project including the outline. The session focused on reconstruction of the entire outline of the paper along with any key sentences and ideas that could be remembered. The contingency plan was then introduced and it was emphasized that the plan was not devised in response to her losing the paper and outline. Lisa accepted this plan and stated that it appeared fair. She was then given an assignment for the next week: completion of a reasonable portion of the Hobbit paper, including the

introduction and a second major segment. Time was allotted during this session for her to begin working from the reconstructed outline; she felt sure that she could finish the assignment given by the next week. Before ending this session, Lisa's schedule for the upcoming week was reviewed and time periods were identified for completion of the assignment. Reinforcers were to be self-administered according to procedures outlined in the previous week's session. Finally, a copy of the outline and the work in progress was made; this copy was to be kept at the clinic to avoid tedious reconstruction of written work in the future.

Family session. When Sylvia picked up Lisa from her session with SSS, a brief family meeting occurred. In this meeting, WPE and SSS described the contingency plan, and Sylvia commented that it was a reasonble plan and thought it would work. WPE and SSS noted that Lisa's loss of the Hobbit paper was unfortunate, but it tended to reflect a persistent pattern that needed to be addressed. SSS suggested that Sylvia make and keep copies of Lisa's drafts of written projects so that work could still continue if projects were lost or forgotten. Sylvia agreed to do this. Then WPE inquired as to Sylvia's attempts to establish a working relationship with Lisa's study hall teacher, an idea suggested three weeks earlier. Sylvia and Lisa

indicated that contact had been made and that the teacher had occasionally monitored Lisa's work. They stated that this approach was working so far and they would try to continue it. As the session ended, Lisa was reminded again of her assignment and the terms of the contingency plan.

Week 11

Client session. Because the assigned work was not completed as expected, the session was canceled via a phone call from Sylvia to WPE.

Parent collateral session. This meeting was initially rescheduled, then canceled by Sylvia for a work-related reason.

Week 12

Client session. At this session, Lisa arrived on time but had not completed the work assigned two weeks ago. (For some inexplicable reason, no cancellation phone call had been received.) She was allowed to sit in the usual work area and was told that if she were to finish in 15 minutes, SSS would meet with her. She did not finish in the allotted time and was given an additional 20 minutes to work. At the end of that time, her work was still in progress; she was allowed to stay and work until the time the session would have ended normally, due to her having to wait for transportation. During the three separate periods Lisa was given to work, she was alone in

the work area and was not assisted by either author. Lisa assured SSS that the work would be done by the next session. Given our previous experience, that prospect looked extremely doubtful.

Parent collateral session. This meeting was canceled by Sylvia due to a work-related schedule conflict.

Week 13

Client session. This session was canceled by the second author due to transportation problems.

Weeks 14 and 15

Client and family sessions. These sessions were canceled by Sylvia, again due to schedule conflicts.

Week 16

Final client session. The agenda for this session was to talk with Lisa and discuss her perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and possible benefits or drawbacks. Lisa stated that she felt the sessions had been very helpful but was unable to state specific academic-related benefits. She had enjoyed working at the university and talking with the authors, however. With the Hobbit project still unfinished, its fate appeared to be a riddle worthy of Bilbo and Gollum.

Week 16

Final Parent Contact. Later that week, Sylvia met briefly with WPE to assess the value of the sessions

and to measure progress in light of the original goals. Both agreed that some progress had occurred toward achieving all three goals, although Sylvia's impressions were more favorable than WPE's. Specifically, WPE indicated that lack of commitment and follow-through on the part of both mother and daughter had precluded complete attainment of goals. Although she acknowledged this explanation, Sylvia claimed that Lisa's progress reflected a level of performance that far exceeded the level displayed in the 4-5 month period immediately following her release from the psychiatric hospital. Sylvia also stated that she had enjoyed the parent collateral sessions with WPE, but found the family sessions less worthwhile because they took time away from Lisa's tutoring with SSS. As the conversation drew to a close, WPE extended an invitation to Sylvia to return with Lisa if circumstances changed with regard to their hectic schedules. Although Sylvia appeared interested in this opportunity, she did not act upon it during the year following treatment.

Conclusion

Although some minor successes of treatment were noted above, in general this case illustrates how a family system can resist change in order to maintain its homeostasis. Both mother and daughter were deeply

involved with numerous personal and professional activities and were unable to reformulate their priorities. When pressure was applied in treatment (e.g., instituting the contingency plan), their reluctance to change became even more apparent.

In general, we saw the individual client sessions to be more effective than the parent or family sessions. Some techniques were used successfully in focusing Lisa's attention and facilitating her work completion. These techniques produced positive changes in our sessions but unfortunately did not generalize to other settings. These techniques included: (a) urging Lisa to complete a thought on paper by having her write an entire sentence and leave blank spaces for words she could not decide on at the moment, (b) not allowing Lisa to make revisions until entire sections of the paper were written, and (c) helping Lisa to ignore or stop negative thoughts (Wolpe, 1973) about her writing. All three strategies were similar in that they served to inhibit Lisa's obsessive-compulsive tendencies.

Finally, as therapists we learned some lessons about recognizing early signs of resistance, which in retrospect seem all too clear (Strean, 1985). First, when Lisa failed to complete our original assignments, we denied that her actions constituted resistance. Second, Lisa's frequent lateness and,

toward the end, Sylvia's persistent appointment cancellations were also powerful signs of resistance that we failed to act upon. Next time, we will endeavor to recognize and deal with events such as these as a part of treatment, and perhaps trigger positive change in the family system.

Bibliography

Carlson, C.I. (1985). Best practices for working with single-parent and stepfamilies. In A. Thomas and J. Grimes (Eds.), Best practices in school psychology (pp.43-60). Stratford, CT: NASP Publications.

Carlson, C. (1987). Children and single-parent homes. In A. Thomas and J.Grimes (Eds.), Children's needs:Psychological perspectives (pp. 560-571). Washington, DC: NASP.

Dombalis, A.O., & Erchul, W.P. (1987). Multiple family group therapy: A review of its applicability to the practice of school psychology. School Psychology Review, 16, 487-497.

Rotter, J.B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 80 (1), 1-27, (Whole No.609).

Strean, H.S. (1985). Resolving resistances in psychotherapy. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Tolkien, J.R. (1977). The hobbit: Or, there and back again. New York: H.N. Abrams.

Weinstein, C.E., Schulte, A.C., & Palmer, D.R. (1987). Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI). Clearwater, FL: H & H Publishing Company, Inc.

Wolpe, J. (1973). The practice of behavior therapy (2nd ed.), Oxford: Pergamon.

Table 1

Daughter and Mother Priority Rankings of Daughter's Activities

Daughter's Priorities	Mother's Priorities	Mother's Perceptions of Daughter's Priorities	Daughter's Activities
1	1	2	Psychiatrist sessions
2	4	1	Time with boyfriend
3	7	8	Time with friends
4	2	3	Music lessons
5	8	7	Performances
6	9	6	Free time for self
7	3	4	Daily homework
8	5	5	Longer written assignments
9	6	9	Meetings of women's group

Note. 1 = highest priority, 9 = lowest priority.